

Stoddart (9.)

T O

The LORD PROVOST.

My LORD,

THIS letter is addressed to you by an Old Burgher, a wellwisher of yours, and one who is as zealous for the honour, the interest, and independence of the city, as your Lordship can be.

I acknowledge, with gratitude, you have been a very good Provost; I will not say the best, but equal to any of them I have known for about forty years past.

Your opponents say, that, in consequence of your spirit, and liberality of sentiment, the town's funds have gone rather too freely out during your reign, in proportion to the present state of her revenue; but this, I hope, is not true, and that you may easily be justified on that head.

I wish I could say so of the business of Deacon Sommers, wherein from the heat of party-zeal, many think you have, perhaps, degraded the dignity of your office, as parent, and universal guardian, of the citizens persons and liberty. *but not a moment of the Rascally part*

Your bold proposal, of allowing the extraordinary deacons a vote in shortening the leets, or taking away that power of shortening from the council as to deacons entirely, may be very proper, if the other alterations to be joined are so; but these you have not explained. The proposal, however, is extremely well calculated to raise a cry in your favour, and increase your Lordship's popularity at this time, among that great body, the trades of Edinburgh. But your brethren merchants may perhaps think, you take too much upon you in regard to their privileges, without consulting them first at large.

Every good citizen must be much hurt by the abuse and scurrility thrown out against your Lordship, and other characters equally respectable, of different sides, in the course of the election-contest; and whoever, and of whatever rank he may be, who encourages such abuse and ribaldry, he is, in my opinion, highly blameable.

That your Lordship's occupation and good character well intitled you to offices in the council and magistracy, and that you was in council before our present Right Honourable member of parliament

had

** I'll admit
a great deal
like revenue
squandered on
all of it
party money
committee spent
drinking & feasting
Shower dues
every Saturday
feast & treat
sums paid in no
to a particular
men most ex-
changed & with
attention, these
number of per-
sons*

had any influence there, is notoriously known. But whether you would have been even Dean of Guild without your connection with him, is very doubtful; and that you would not have been first magistrate at the last election, nor perhaps ever, or till long after this, without his patronage, is, I believe, certain^{I am not} for your Lordship, and every one knows, that the best talents and abilities are not what lead to that office; on the contrary, they are often an invincible bar to the person's possessing them ever attaining to it. ^{certain}

It is the general belief here, that you was promoted to the office in contradiction to hopes given of it to another gentleman, who had formerly filled it, with equal dignity and spirit with yourself; and if so, the favour done to your Lordship was the greater.

That this seems to have been the case, appears by your letter to Bailie Walker; as you say, p. 3. Sir L—— D—— was positive to support Mr D——le's nomination for Provost, from engagements he said he had been under since the time you had come into office; and which probably you could be no stranger to from the beginning.

You tell us in this letter, That the principle you and B. Walker set out upon, was to lessen the influence of a party, whose management had so long been considered as selfish and contracted, and to introduce into the council men of more enlarged views, and who should be of the most reputable, both merchants and trades. A little lower, you tells us, the person who was at the head of this selfish and narrow-minded party, had recommended, and in another place you say had nominated, Mr D——le to be your successor; and that you saw no other end he could have in the proposal, than an attempt to *preserve the little interest he had in council from entirely sinking*. You had also before told us, that Mr D——le had, upon all occasions, expressed the utmost contempt of the person who now recommended him. It is upon this point only, however, of a successor to your Lordship, and your refusing to hear of Mr D——le to be Provost, that all the present dispute in the city has happened.

You say to your friend and former patron to this purpose in effect. — It is true^{not true} you made me Provost, after giving hopes of it to Mr D——le, or at least positively engaging to support his nomination to that office when it became vacant again: but this promise you must now break, and allow me to nominate a Provost who shall be under my direction: he must not be an active man. And you must allow all your other friends, who first brought you into power in Edinburgh, and who have elected you twice into parliament, to be kicked out of council; and you must depend entirely on me in future; and if you refuse, I have a party formed, who will force you into it.



I mean not to make any apology for the old party, or for Sir L.; but every one must own that this gentleman was brought into a very particular dilemma here by his friend. The public good is made the cause or pretence of all this. I could figure a case, though it is extremely difficult to do so, perhaps, sufficient to justify such conduct from one friend to another. Had the former party wantonly squandered the town's revenue, or brought its credit into danger; had they filled our churches, professorships, and other places, with improper persons; had the patron interfered in every little internal office of the city, and left it not in the power of the council almost to chuse even a church-beadle without his permission, as we have known done by a former residing patron; had he proposed a person who would have disgraced the office of provost, in place of one who had filled it with the greatest spirit and dignity; or had your Lordship been thwarted in every good scheme for public utility;—had all these, or any of them, been the case, perhaps there might have been some excuse for such a conduct from one friend to another: but they are not even pretended. *indeed they are*

The only excuse is, that the old party was thought to act on selfish and contracted principles. This, my Lord, is too thin. To what then are we to attribute all this noise and bustle, and this hard dealing, to say no more, with a friend? To nothing, surely, but to your Lordship's and some of your friends precipitant ambition, by grasping at that power immediately, which, from the age and avocations of the former conductor, as you call him, of the old party, and other circumstances, must inevitably have fallen into your hands in a year or two, if you could have had patience.

It is in vain to pretend that your aim was only the interest of the public, or your desire to have persons of proper spirit in the magistracy, or even the depression of the old narrow-minded party. You have told us yourself, that their power was little, and entirely sinking; that the person proposed by your friend as chief magistrate, had a perfect contempt of the leader of the sinking party, so was no-wise likely to rear that party up again. Undoubtedly then, my Lord, however you may pretend to cover it, your jealousy was not of the old narrow-minded party, but of Mr D——le, a man of public spirit, like yourself, whom you probably meant to keep for ever out of the chair, for fear he should stand in the way of some of your secret ambitious plans: for you will not pretend that he would have thwarted any you could have for the good of the public: on the contrary, he was more able to forward any such plans, from his being in the vigour of life, than the person you have proposed in his place, who, however respectable, proper, and well intitled to the office otherwise, is far on in the decline of life.

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His Lordship

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I sincerely wish your Lordship had omitted several reflections in your letter against your late friends. In the particular situation you stood with them, they were very improper ; and I am informed they are also void of foundation.

Upon the whole, I extremely regret the disagreeable situation into which you have brought yourself and your late friend. I think it very difficult, if not impossible, to justify your conduct to him, as your political benefactor at least. I wish your ambition, and that of some of your friends had been less precipitant: *Festina lente*, my Lord, is a good old adage, and I wish you had kept it in your eye. The epithet of *Jehu* has been bestowed by your party upon one of the soundest heads and best magistrates I have ever known in Edinburgh; perhaps it would have better suited your Lordship, and some of your seconds. I hope your Lordship will, for your own sake, as well as that of the public, drive less furiously, when you come again into power.

I have the honour to be, with great respect, &c.

ANOTHER OLD MAGISTRATE.

Edinburgh, Sept. 30. 1776.

